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Subject: Listening Sessions Recap - Affirmations and Actions

To: FACULTY GROUP <faculty@belmont.edu>, STAFF GROUP <staff@belmont.edu>

Students, Faculty and Staff,

Since the last [update on June 24](#) from our Welcome Home Diversity Council and Office of Multicultural Learning and Experience, Belmont leaders have spent many hours reviewing and analyzing the feedback we received during our recent listening sessions. Through 18 sessions – 17 of which I personally attended – 350 students, faculty, staff and alumni shared with us about the impact of racism in our culture as well as their experience of it on our campus. It was imperative for us to take this time to listen and to learn. The thoughtfulness, passion and strong sense of purpose these individuals brought to these sessions will, I believe, lead to a significant milestone in Belmont's history. Thanks to their honesty and insight, we are better prepared to combat racism, inequality and prejudice here at Belmont and in the communities we each impact away from campus.

Before I share a summary of themes and next steps, it's important for me to affirm a few things for our entire community.

At Belmont University, we believe that we were all created as equals by our God. Based on that belief, Belmont seeks to be an inclusive and welcoming community that loves and values every individual regardless of race, gender, religion, disability, age, national or ethnic origin, or sexual orientation.

With that said, yes, Black Lives Matter to me and to Belmont. While our country's treatment of Native Americans, minorities and immigrants from all parts of the world has resulted in people being systematically devalued, diminished and destroyed throughout our history, the recently renewed focus on the mistreatment of Black Americans has created a broad outpouring of demands that we bring an end to systemic racism wherever we find it.

Belmont is intent on being a part of the solution. We know that words alone are not enough. We must create a culture that values race, ethnicity and differences as contributing to the strength of our university. And, we must take action to change and build that culture.

What follows are our first steps toward that goal in the form of four overarching themes that emerged from this summer's listening sessions as well as examples of specific items that have been prioritized for immediate action. As long as this list is, it is just a beginning.

A STRATEGIC SHIFT IN CULTURE

- Diversity, inclusion, and equity will continue to be embedded in the soon to be announced Vision 2025 plan, but it will also be elevated in our efforts as one of eight broad strategies for the overall guidance of the university.
- This heightened awareness is intended to make these topics routine points of consideration in our decision-making and in our daily interactions.

ENHANCING OUR EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS

- University leadership will participate in learning sessions that are intended to identify areas of discomfort and confront them in efforts to combat racism.
- We will reintroduce the "Belmont State of Mind" training and campaign to campus to be more explicit in spreading our community values.
- This year's Faculty Workshop will focus on opportunities to address race, diversity and inclusion.

- Faculty members will be asked to include diversity and inclusion-related topics in each of their classes—we will seek ways to utilize the faculty evaluation process to reward those who lead and support this effort.
- “Champions” will be identified in each college who will mentor and partner with faculty colleagues in their efforts to embed diversity in their courses.
- First Year Seminar will address additional topics and readings related to race and inclusion.
- First Year Writing classes will be restructured to provide additional opportunities to learn and write about race and diversity.
- Both the Curb College of Entertainment & Music Business and the College of Music & Performing Arts have been asked to examine their programs to determine how to broaden the learning and presentation of music to further include genres that are rooted in the Black experience.
- Additional WELL Core sessions and BOLD training workshops will address topics such as implicit bias and micro-aggressions.
- Diversity, equity and inclusion training will be required for all student leaders.
- We will redouble our efforts to recruit and retain diverse faculty and staff.
- Our efforts to enhance faculty diversity through the Faculty Scholars Program will continue and intensify.
- We will seek ways to utilize the complete and accurate history of the Belmont Mansion as an educational component to help students, and all who come in contact with the Mansion, to understand and acknowledge the history of portions of Belmont’s property prior to the establishment of Belmont College/University. The Faculty Senate has an ad hoc committee developing a plan to create a physical plaque or other monument that will recognize the full history of the property.

PROVIDING ADDITIONAL STUDENT SUPPORT

- We will increase the visibility of Black fraternity and sorority chapters.
- We will create a greater sense of cooperation among all of the Greek organizations.
- We will provide support for the Black Student Association and provide BSA leaders with established communication lines with campus leadership and the Faculty Senate leaders along with the opportunity to serve on relevant university committees.
- Additional student representation will be added to the Welcome Home Diversity Council, which is the lead group for moving these initiatives forward and holding the campus accountable.
- We will create a formalized process for reporting and following up on incidents involving inappropriate race-related interactions.
- More business and professional people of color will be invited to speak on their professional pathways, whether they are physicians, scientists, lawyers, judges, business leaders, entrepreneurs, etc.

SUPPORTING THE NASHVILLE COMMUNITY

- We will explore partnerships and educational opportunities with community organizations devoted to racial justice and reconciliation.
- We will ensure that a diverse mix of businesses, congregations and other organizations are invited to campus events such as job fairs, church fairs, etc.
- We will expand our partnerships with local HBCUs Fisk and Tennessee State.
- We will intensify recruiting efforts at Nashville State Community College and Volunteer State in an effort to attract more two-year graduates of color.
- We will continue to build up our purchasing program designed to engage minority-owned businesses as business partners with Belmont.
- We will expand service learning opportunities for students to serve under-represented populations in our communities.
- We will continue and expand our partnership with the National Museum of African American Music.
- We will continue and expand partnerships to support Metro Nashville Public Schools via the PENCIL Foundation, Alignment Nashville and the Nashville Alliance for Public Education
- We will continue and expand our partnership with Metro Nashville Public Schools to create a pathway for Metro students to enroll at Belmont.

As long as this list is, it still doesn't capture every good idea that has been put forward. Much of this work is already underway. The Faculty Senate in particular has been very responsive to the input that has been received thus far. There's much more to do, but I believe this represents a good start. I hope you will join me as we seek to move these items forward even as we continue to expand the agenda.

I also want to say thank you to every one of the 350+ Belmont people who participated in the 18 different listening sessions. In addition, sincere gratitude is due to Dr. Susan West for organizing these important sessions; Dr. Mary Clark for facilitating along with assistance from Mr. Gary Hunter and Dr. Mona Ivey-Soto; Dr. Sabrina Sullenberger for documenting and synthesizing session data; and Dr. Cheryl Slay Carr, Ms. Angie Bryant and Ms. Haley Charlton for providing support to record several sessions. I also want to extend a very special and personal thank you to Dr. Mary Clark for helping us all be respectful of one another and for keeping us on point. Belmont is already better because of the good work done by these people.

I look forward to the time when we are all back on campus together, living out a shared vision for Belmont to be a community that celebrates its differences and loves and values every person equally.

Sincerely,
Bob Fisher